



God's Voice In The Thunder: It Feels Like Something's About To Happen

John 12:20-33

Inspiration for You:

NOTE: If you are using this as a sermon begin by leading the congregation in a quiet rendition of This Little Light of Mine. If you can find a small child to lead this part, that's even better.

A youth pastor told me a story one time....

He said when his mother was a little girl she was raised by an aunt and uncle. She lived in a small house with them and another aunt. The other aunt was terrified of thunderstorms. It was a long held fear that wasn't going anywhere. If a thunderstorm came in the middle of the night the whole family had to be awake and sitting around the kitchen table until it passed. It didn't matter if you were tired or if you had work or school the next day. If it was thundering you were awake and sitting around the table.

His mother grew up, got married, had kids of her own and decided that her boys were never going to be afraid of thunderstorms. So when one came along during the day she would take her boys and sit out on the front porch and play "Who can see the lightning first?" She taught them how to count after the lightning and figure out how far away the storm is. Both the youth pastor who gave me this story and his brother, to this day, love thunderstorms.

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There is something about that sound of Thunder that makes the hairs on the back of your neck stand up. It says, "Something big is coming."

Let me ask this.....

If you go to a movie with your spouse or on a date or with friends....do you need to be in the seat before the trailers begin? Is the "coming attractions" part of the movie going experience for you?

Do you remember sitting in school and seeing the first snowflakes of the year. Christmas is coming!

Do you remember the sound of the bus coming over the hill?

Do you get excited over the sound of one page of the calendar being torn away leaving the brand new month front and center?

What if the thunder is not in the distance. What if the storm starts right where you are?

NOTE: If you are using this as part of a sermon outline pause here and lean in close like you are listening for something. Let the silence hang, then in your loudest voice shout BA DA BOOOOOOOOM!!!!

This moment in the scriptures is like that. Jesus is talking about his death. He has hinted at it before but this time he's saying it outright. So the words are "I'm going to die."

The scriptures say Jesus said, "My soul is troubled but..."

What does a person's voice sound like who has a troubled soul? Think of the music you would hear sitting in a blues bar in New Orleans listening to the singer make his guitar weep.

The words being said are "My soul is troubled..." but the event itself is thunder.

I love how the scriptures say some people heard thunder, others heard the voice of God and some said the angels were speaking to them.

Jesus talks about wheat here. His audience is primarily farmers and people who work the land. They know about seed pods. It's kind of like blowing on a dandelion. Better yet, think about a piñata. Until the piñata is broken it hasn't really served its purpose yet.

Once you blow on the dandelion, once your break open the pinata...It's not going back. Ever.

This is Jesus in a not-going-back moment.

He tells them about light.

One light in a dark room changes the room. If the lights in your house go off in the thunderstorm what's the first thing you do? Find a flashlight or whip out your phone. What's the first thing you look for after that?

More lights.

You find the candles or the other flashlights. You change the room with one light. It's not a dark room anymore. You can't walk around in darkness. Jesus is the light. That light gets used to find other lights. At this point no one can say it's a dark room anymore. You can close your eyes and bump into things but that doesn't make it a dark room. There's light. It's being passed around. You can see it or not. Your choice.

Some heard the thunder. Some did not.

So what kind of church are we going to be? The light is already here. Jesus was the light and he calls everyone who came to see him "Children of light." This room...this world, it's not dark anymore. Our job is to find more lights. The more lights you create the easier it's going to be find even more.

We are children of the light.

Let it shine.

Let it shine.

Let it shine.

Let it shine.

Information for you:

In every good story there is that moment when it feels like something is about to happen. The characters have been developed. The plot has been established. And then the tension has built to a point where the audience knows that something is about to unfold.

In our text today from John 12:20-33, this is the way the audience feels. The time is during the week of Passover and Jesus has been watching the throngs of people from all over the countryside and beyond make their way into Jerusalem and thus the Temple to celebrate.

There was a special sense of electricity and anticipation in the air because the whole crowd who was in town had been buzzing about Jesus' actions in recent days. This one from Galilee had cleansed the Temple and made the Court of the Gentiles free from the chaos that had taken up residence on the inside of what was intended to be designated as the entrance to holy ground. He drove out the animals and those scamming the people coming to worship and pay their Temple tax. Yes, Jesus had caused quite an uproar as we see in John 2. Then a few chapters later the Son of God really gave them good gossip to spread among the Jerusalem countryside. He had just raised his friend Lazarus from the dead in John 11 and such news had spread like wildfire among the people.

His popularity had risen among the Jews and Gentiles alike. What was Jesus about to do next if he had no fear of the religious leaders in the Temple and if death was not an issue for him to overcome with a word to his deceased friend now alive and well again? What would it be like to sit down face to face with him and have a conversation? Unless they asked for some time with the Lord, these Greeks who had come into town to worship and celebrate the Passover might not know. It never hurts to ask. So they did.

What would start as an invitation to Jesus from some Greeks would quickly turn into a response about death and what was about to happen in the coming days for Jesus.

²⁰Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks.²¹ So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus."²² Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.²³ And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.²⁵ Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.²⁶ If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

²⁷"Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour.²⁸ Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven: "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it

again.”²⁹ The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.”³⁰ Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine.”³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”³³ He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.” John 12:20-33

Scholars differ about the actual location this part of Jesus’ story took place. Yes, it was in Jerusalem; but where in Jerusalem? Was it in a home? Was it on the street? Perhaps it was in the Temple. We just do not know for certain. What we do know is that Greek men wanted to try and have some face time with Jesus.

Perhaps it was indeed inside the Temple borders. Jesus, a Jewish man, could have been located in a place that was off limits to Greeks and other non-Jews. Perhaps these Greek men saw Philip, a disciple with a fellow Greek name, walking through the Court of the Gentiles where both Jew and Greek would have been allowed. Perhaps these Greek men were so thankful that Jesus had cleaned up this outer part of the Temple in the Court of Gentiles where they finally could attempt to worship in peace that they just wanted an audience with the one who had such power to overthrow and clean up such a corrupt system of religious rituals and merchants.

So the Greek men approach Philip who in turn approaches Andrew who in turn seeks out Jesus to bring forth their request for an audience.

“²⁰ Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks.²¹ So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.”²² Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.” John 12:20-22

They had nothing to lose and everything to gain. If Jesus declined, they were no worse for wear. But if he said, “Yes,” then what might the next moments of their lives be in store for on that day?

So they made the request and then waited for his disciples to relay the message. While Jesus listened to this request by two of his disciples on behalf of these Greek men, Jesus responds with words that added weightiness to the moment. In a sense, these Greeks just want to have coffee and Jesus starts talking about his impending death through agricultural metaphors.

²³And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

²⁷“Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. ²⁸Father, glorify your name.” John 12:23-28

It is difficult to imagine how Jesus could have been able to keep his emotions in check knowing that the full measure of the cross that came with the entire wrath of God was quickly approaching him. His glory would come not first with a crown, but with a cross. The time was at hand. His hour had come. The moment was upon him that he had left the majesty and worship of heaven for three decades earlier. All hell was about to break loose on his life so that all heaven might be experienced by those who would ever call him their Lord. The only way for such things to unfold is for his life to be as the single kernel of wheat that falls into the ground and dies. When it does, such a sacrificial death produces much fruit.

Jesus tells his friends that the condition of his soul at such a consequential thought is “troubled.” The verb “troubled” is from the word *tarasso* which means literally “to shake” or “to stir up.” It is used in a context that implies a strong or severe mental and spiritual agitation that disrupts one on the inside. Jesus uses the verb in the perfect tense which means this was something that he was dealing with on the inside as an ongoing struggle at the thought of what was on his horizon. He could not quit thinking about what was about to happen to him and all the pain and anguish that was about to fall upon him with such force. He who knew no sin was about to become sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God. The great exchange was about to take place as the innocent one might become guilty so that the guilty might become innocent.

Jesus was not on his way to the cross in an unemotional or detached kind of frame of mind. He was shaken to the core and stirred emotionally at the enormity of what was about to happen. Yet, he was keenly aware that this is what he came to earth to accomplish in the first place. His hour was at hand. He had come to die. And this death of the perfect one would bring great glory to the Father who had sent him to rescue

humanity from sin, death, Satan and hell. And thus he moved forward to the cross with deliberate steps of destiny that would lead to our eternal security in the coming days.

Concerning this hour leading to Jesus' death, biblical scholar John MacArthur writes words of great consequence. "Of all the truths in the Christian faith, the death of Jesus Christ, accompanied by His resurrection, is the most precious. Had he not died, there would be no substitute for sin. Were there no substitute, there would be no offer of salvation. Were there no salvation, there would be no hope. And were there no hope, there would be no future but hell."

Yes, it was Jesus' death that was about to happen. And his death was the hour that he had come to live for in the first place. His death is what had been foretold by the prophets of old. Even though Israel did not comprehend it, the Old Testament clearly portrays that the Messiah was to come and to die. Note some of these places in the Old Testament that speak of the Messiah's death and the details that would surround it.

Zechariah 12:10 says,

"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn."

Psalm 41:9 foretells of his betrayer. (cf. John 13:18)

"E v e n m y c l o s e f r i e n d i n w h o m I t r u s t e d ,
who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me."

Zechariah 11:12-13 speaks of the price paid to betray the Messiah. (cf. Matthew 26:15)

¹²Then I said to them, "If it seems good to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them." And they weighed out as my wages thirty pieces of silver.¹³ Then the LORD said to me, "Throw it to the potter"—the lordly price at which I was priced by them. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD, to the potter."

Isaiah 50:6 tells of the physical abuse Christ would suffer at his trial. (cf. Matthew 26:67; 27:26)

"I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting."

Psalm 22:6-8, 14-18 speaks of Christ's death by crucifixion which at the time it was written was a form of execution that the Jews found to be foreign. (cf. Matthew 27:39-43; John 19:23-24, 37)

“But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people.

All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!...

I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.

For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet—I can count all my bones—they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.”

Psalm 69:21 speaks of what would unfold for Jesus on the cross when they tried to give him something to drink to help with his thirst. (cf. Matthew 27:34, 48)

“They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.”

Psalm 31:5 give the words that Jesus would say on the cross before he breathed his last. (cf. Luke 23:46)

“Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.”

Psalm 34:20 depicts that none of the Messiah's bones would be broken at his death. (cf. John 19:32-36)

“He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken.”

Of course the most well-known and referenced Old Testament prophecy of the Messiah's death is found in Isaiah 52:13-53:12 known as the Suffering Servant passages.

¹³Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted.¹⁴As many were astonished at you—his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind —¹⁵so shall he sprinkle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of

him; for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand.

53 Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? ²For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. ³He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. ⁴Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. ⁶All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ⁷He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. ⁸By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? ⁹And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. ¹⁰Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. ¹¹Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. ¹²Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.”

All of these Old Testament prophecies and many more not referenced here are what caused Jesus to be troubled in his soul. He was now approaching the hour when all that had been foretold would come to fruition in his own life. As much as he would have liked to have had the Father remove the cup of this wrath from in front of him, Jesus knew it was for this very hour that he had come on this mission of redemption and rescue in the first place. No cross of suffering would mean no crown of glory. And it was for the glory of God that Jesus was most interested.

“Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” ²⁹The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” ³⁰Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine.” John 12:28-30

Jesus was locked in to the mission at hand. He already had his Father’s approval and had heard him speak both at his baptism and on the Mount of Transfiguration. Those moments when the voice of God thundered were to bolster the soul of Jesus; however, this thundering voice from heaven in John 12 was for the benefit of those who would watch the events on the horizon unfold. Still, at this point in the story they did not know what to expect in full. Even though Jesus had told them plainly in previous conversations what would take place, those present just felt like something was about to happen even if they could not articulate what it was.

“³¹Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. ³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” ³³He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.” John 12:31-33

Jesus wraps up this soliloquy to the invitation to meet with the Greeks by speaking of the events about to happen. Satan was about to be cast out as Jesus spoke of his own approaching death on the cross. His death was the primary purpose of the incarnation, the constant theme of his teaching, and was the central subject of apostolic preaching. Without the cross, any gospel preached is not a true gospel. For it was the cross that led to the rescue and the fulfillment of all that Jesus came to do: save his people from their sins.

The beauty behind these words spoken in reference to the Greeks’ invitation to “see Jesus” is that all that was about to happen was to include not only Jews, but also Gentiles for all generations to come. As Jesus spoke about the seed falling into the earth and dying to thus produce more fruit, he was talking about a wider harvest of people from all nations, tribes, and races that would belong in the family of God reaching far beyond the borders of Israel and the Jews. Jesus saw these Greeks as the first among many who soon would have access into the family of God.

All this would be made possible by his death on the cross. And what was about to happen in the years to follow would be a remembrance of his death as the church celebrates the two ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Both ordinances represent the death of Christ and the life that can be experienced for all who put their

faith, hope and trust in Jesus. So much was about to happen at this point in the story found in John 12. However, the walk to the cross still had to take place as this sacrificial lamb would be slain once and for all that would cause a celebration of thanksgiving and hope greater than any could anticipate at the time. Jesus knew it all was about to happen. Those close to him on that day just felt like something was about to happen. They could not have been more right!